

VANCOMYCIN RESISTANT ENTEROCOCCI (VRE)

What is it?

Enterococci are bacteria that are commonly found in a person's bowels or female vaginal tract. VRE are enterococci bacteria that have become resistant to certain antibiotics. Antibiotics that would usually be used to treat an infection caused by a certain bacteria won't work if the person has a resistant type of the bacteria. Because of this, they are usually a little harder and may take more time to treat than other infections.

Who gets it?

An infection from one of these bacteria usually happens to individuals who have weakened immune systems and have been treated repeatedly with antibiotics. Healthy people rarely get these infections.

Can it spread?

Yes. The bacteria can spread among other people with weak immune systems that may not be able to fight off infection. It is almost always spread on the hands of caregivers or by mouth with contaminated food or objects and not through the air. Again, healthy people are at very little risk of getting infected with this bacteria. So, as long as a person is healthy, it is okay for them to be in the same room with a person who is infected or colonized. Be sure to wash your hands carefully before leaving the room. Disposable gloves should be worn if contact with body fluids, especially stool, is expected. Wash hands before and after wearing gloves.

Is it treatable?

Yes. Although the bacteria may be resistant to many antibiotics and difficult to treat, some antibiotics can still successfully cure the infection.

What is the difference between "colonization" and "infection"?

COLONIZATION means that the bacteria is in or on the person's body but is not making them sick. Colonization may not need to be treated at all.

INFECTION means that the bacteria are present in or on a person's body and it is making them sick. Infections are treated with certain antibiotics.

A person can spread the bacteria to others whether they are colonized or infected.

Proper use of Standard Precautions will prevent spread of this condition! Visit www.cdc.gov or www.mass.gov/dph for more information

What are some signs of infection with one of these bacteria?

If a person you support:

- develops a cough or their cough worsens
- has drainage that appears around a tube or wound
- develops a fever
- has loose stools or diarrhea
- has been on antibiotics frequently

What should you do?

Call 911 if the person:

- looks very sick
- won't wake up
- has chills or is shaking
- is confused or disoriented
- has low blood pressure and a fast heart rate
- has decreased urine output
- has a high fever or very warm skin

Other situations:

- Consult your nurse or the health care provider
- Write down what you see and what you think might be the cause
- Share what you see and think with other staff and your supervisor
- If the person appears sick, call the health care provider
- Share what you see and think with the HCP and/or nurse